‘When Europe blinks’ in Anita Desai’s Novels through Doubles and Doublings

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Received: May 27, 2018
Accepted: July 14, 2018

ABSTRACT

Novel in India has not only received its masters like R.K. Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand, but also its mistress like Anita Desai. Europe blinked in her novels more substantially than anybody else. The tradition of European psychological novel is baptised with more innovative technical apparatus like doubles and doublings which anticipate the things like creating parallel-event situations, parallel character entreaties, and reproducing analogous moments in the lives of the characters and ensuring the corresponding stylistic and technical adaptation. When doubles are progeny doublings function as parenting agency. Desai’s novels are always in search of human mind and its half-remembered truth. The fictional world of her is in the endless quest for exploring better with the novelistic weapons that may reveal human mind with penetrating insight. She preferred to present parallel life situation that can present life’s truth in a more convenient manner. This article will endeavour to outline such analogous life situations, mirrored characters, corresponding dialogues and other technical apparatus of novel that Desai has perfectly executed in her novels.

Keywords: Doubles, Doubling, Analogous Characters, Similar Theme, Agnate Life Helm

Introduction:

If Desai is the fourth child of her parents, she herself is the mother of eleven concisely written novels that mark the new-beginning of Indian fiction with European legacy. Her novels are set in well-known family situations with the people as characters who are having no straightforward knowledge of the life they lived so far, and of the life’s situations they faced so long, the ignorance they yoked since inception. Dr. J. P. Tripathi said that in Desai’s novels “supremacy of the family motive is another weighty theme.” Though family motive is prevalent in her novels, Desai is no less behind in the use of doubling. She is the claimant of successorship in the empire of doubles after Ian McEwen. Doubling is the art of creating similar choice, appearance and action between two characters or more than that within a work or works. Besides resemblance among characters, doubling includes similar theme, technique in various works by the same author. William Shakespeare was the first writer in English Literature who ascended the throne of the kingdom of doubles with the publication of Twelfth Night and Two Gentlemen of Verona. In Twelfth Night the bard of Avon created two characters namely Viola disguised as Cesario and Sebastian who are quite identical in their looks. And that’s why, Olivia, mistaking Sebastian as Cesario, demanded to marry her. So, Viola disguised as Cesario is the literary double of Sebastian. In Elizabethan Age Shakespeare paved the way of doubling on which Jonathan Swift in Transitional Age, Ian McEwen and Martin Amis in Post Modern Age trod and Anita Desai is expecting the same. Desai’s application of doubling in her novels like Voices in the City, Clear Light of the Day, In Custody, Cry, the Peacock, Bye-Bye Blackbird, and Where Shall We Go This Summer? is resulted into literary doubles which are caught red handed. Characters in their outlook and action have resembled one another sometimes within a single novel like Clear Light of Day and sometimes among novels like Voices in the City and Bye-Bye Blackbird. Themes like alienation, ill marital relationship and techniques like Flash back, stream of consciousness, use of symbols and use of poetry are connatural among her novels.

Resemblance in characterization:

Worshipped as modern Indo-English writer Anita Desai is unique in the art of characterization. In this art she is admittedly a perfect artist with her prominent efficacy. She has weaved the characters of each novel with the needle of doubling. More or less each and every character in her novels is alike either in their physiognomy, choice or in their action. In 1980 Anita Desai published her fifth novel entitled as Clear Light of Day. Desai herself marked the novel as “a four-dimensional piece on how a family’s life moves backwards and forwards in a period of time” (India Today 142). The novel includes some four principal characters namely Raja, Bim(short for Bimla), Tara and Baba. Raja, the eldest child (son) and Bim, the daughter of Mr. And Mrs. Das are literary doubles in their common choice. In their early life they both were voracious reader of English poetry. Raja used to borrow the volumes of Tennyson and Swinburne from the library of Hindu College and lend them to Bim for reading. They used to enjoy reading poetry together and quoting them...
Like Mr. Das, Gautama is a Hindu boy not safe in Muslim educational institution rather in Hindu college loves to visit club for playing bridge. Similarly, Gautama is careless and indifferent to his wife Maya who is continuously haunted by an astrologer's prophecy that either she or her husband is going to die in the fourth year of their marital life. Being a busy lawyer he is deaf to the demands of his wife. Again, Gautama's inattentiveness to his wife equalizes Jiban's carelessness to his wife Monisha in *Voices in the City*. So, Mr. Das is a double of both Gautama and Jiban.

*In Custody*, the seventh novel of Anita Desai published in 1984, presents a very promising character in the name of Deven Sharma who is a part time lecturer in a small-town college of Mirpore. Deven Sharma, though a teacher of Hindi, is a lover of Urdu poetry. He is a great admirer of Urdu poet Nur Shahjehanbadi. In *Clear Light of Day* Raja's infatuation for Urdu language and Urdu literature begins in his school life. He becomes too much interested in Urdu poetry especially. So, similarity is here between Deven and Raja on their equal love for Urdu. Deven Sharma visits Delhi in a regular interval to spend some valuable time with Nur Sahib. He wants to record his interview with him so that he can transcribe his Urdu poetry and write a memoir of Nur Shahjehanbadi. On the other hand, Raja pays visit to the library of Hyder Ali, a Muslim landlord and a reader of Urdu books to make him more interested and enrich his knowledge in Urdu. Therefore, it is clear that Both Deven and Raja are looking for a Guru of Urdu. Once again for materialising their purpose they both pay a little attention to their family. Deven spends no time with wife and children in need and rather sends his wife along with the child to his father-in-law's house so that he can absorb in his own affair and in the same way Raja, instead of taking the burden of responsibility of his own family on his own shoulder, leaves the family including sister Bim and a mentally retarded brother Baba and settles in Hyderabad.

The above discussion proves that Anita Desai is successful in creating Deven Sharma a literary double of Raja. Consisted of four sections such as Nirode, Monisha, Amla and Mother, *Voices in the City* appeared in 1965 as Anita Desai’s second novel. In the novel Monisha, the elder sister of Nirod is highly sensitive woman. Her sensitivity is quite similar to May’s sensitiveness in *Cry, the Peacock*. Maya is shocked at the death of her pet dog Toto and Monisha can’t tolerate the discussion by the relatives and neighbours on her physical deformity i.e. childlessness. Like Maya she is also a miserable misfit and maladjusted among her in-laws. Being deprived of the romantic love and physical attachment of her husband Gautama Maya lives alone in a corner of the family. Usha Pathania’s remark on Maya is praiseworthy: “the flow of love, admiration and sympathy is suddenly disrupted when Gautama, giving too much attachment to money, name and fame, shows displeasure for too much physical contact and for her romantic bond and aesthetic temperament. Maya feels rejected, unwanted and lost (Pathania 49). Monisha is almost like a ‘jailbird’ in the house of her husband and living in an isolated state. Her husband Jiban advises her to cooperate with the other members in the house. He is ignorant of her feelings, desires and emotions. As if she has become an ‘outsider’ in her own house. Alienation swallows her and she cries: “lives spent in waiting for nothing, waiting for men self-centered and different and hungry... and dying misunderstood, always being bars, those terrifying black bars that shut us in, the old houses, in the old city” (*Voices in the City*). She is a failure in her relationship with her husband Jiban and Maya is also unsuccessful in her relationship with Gautama. So, Monisha is also a literary double of Maya. And each couple (husband and wife) in Anita Desai’s novels is proved to be doubles for having different attitude and taste. For example, *In Custody* is a novel where the husband is interested in literature, but his wife Sarla has no love for literature and in *Cry, the peacock* Maya has emotion and is sensitive, but Gautama believes in reality and is pragmatic. In the novel *Bye-Bye Blackbird* Dev and Adit are the literary doubles of Nirode and Amla in *Voices in the City*. Dev is as cynical, oversensitive and aggressive as Nirode and Adit is as silent as Amla.

**Similarity in theme:**
The most eminent writer among contemporary Indian woman writers in English Anita Desai is adored as ‘a novelist of considerable merit’. She has a ‘disturbing and demanding presence in Indo-Anglian fiction’ (D.S.Maini 216) for her newness in theme and storytelling technique. ‘Marital maladjustment’ or...
'Incompatible marriage' is a theme which makes Desai's first novel *Cry, the Peacock* a literary double of her second novel *Voices in the City*. In *Cry, the Peacock* the marital relationship between Maya and Gautama is dissatisfactory and there is no harmony between husband and wife. To Gautama money is the basic need of life and he looks for happiness in money while to Maya money is not the synonym of life as she cries: "...and why must it always be money? It's always be money, or property never a case of passion and revenge, murder and exciting things life that basic things why?" *(Cry, the Peacock)* Thus, the disharmony between love hungry and emotional Maya and logical and unemotional Gautama sets off in part I and continues in part II with Maya's realization that Gautama is money lover, not wife lover and ends in their death. Similarly, in *Voices in the City* the marriage between Monisha and Jiban is proved to be futile. In the very first day of their marriage Monisha is devastated at the family's deep rooted belief in tradition and gets humiliated when she is compelled to bow his elders for blessing. The distance between husband and wife begins to grow when she is proved to be incapable of bearing child in her womb. The husband has no love for wife and she is turned to be an alien appointed to fulfill others' needs in the family like to message her mother-in-law's legs. Ultimately, absence of affection and love causes her untimely death. Once again *Fire on the Mountain* is another literary double of *Voices in the City* and *Cry, the Peacock* in the aspect of cold relationship between husband and wife. There is an unrequited relationship between Prof. Kaul and Nanda Kaul in *Fire on the Mountain* as Dr. Ansari observes: "...from inside their relationship is all barren."

The novels like *Voices in the City*, *Cry, the peacock*, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*, *Fire on the Mountain* have become literary doubles to each other as theme of alienation is common in each of the novels. According to Ansari, in *Voices in the City* "the theme of alienation is treated in terms of mother-children relationship which itself is a consequence of dissonance in husband-wife relationship...she(Monisha) is alienated from her husband as well as his mother... her relationship with her husband is characterized only by loneliness and lack of communication." In *Cry, the Peacock* Gautama's coldness in the matter of love, his negligence of her likes, the communication gap between them and in-law's indifferent attitude to her push Maya within her 'private hell' surrounded by four walls: 'Torture, dread, guilt, imprisonment'. She finds her husband away from her as she says-"He was not my side at all, but across a river, across a mountain and would always remain so" *(Cry, the Peacock)*.

*Where Shall We Go This Summer?* is elected to be "an interesting addition to Anita Desai's achievement as an Indian Novelist writing in English"*(Vimla Rao:50)*. It is said that being inspired by Virginia Woolf's *To The Lighthouse* Desai wrote this novel. However, the theme of alienation is also applied here. Sita is emotional while Raman, her husband is realistic and practical. Their different attitude to life causes disharmony between them and which in turn brings alienation in the life of Sita. She is away from her husband and also her own children. In the other novel *Fire on the Mountain* which is applauded as "an outstanding novel...sharp and refined, descriptive as well as symbolic" theme of alienation is also visible. Nanda Kaul's life with her husband is not a happy one as he had an extramarital love affair with another woman and Nanda almost plays the role of a lone housekeeper. Again in her retired life "All she wanted was to be alone, to have Carignano to herself in this period of her life when stillness and calm were all that she wishes to entertain." This is how, all those four afore mentioned novels are doubles to each other on the theme of alienation.

**Commonness in technique:**

Technique is the art of storytelling. To Mark Scorer technique is like brush and palette used for painting; no story can be written without technique. In the novels of Anita Desai Flashback is a very common technique used to narrate the early lives of the major characters. Based on Flashback *Cry, the Peacock* is a literary double of *Clear Light of day*. In *Cry, the Peacock* Maya in adult life is remembering her pleasant childhood days with her own father through Flashback: "when with my father, even the breakfast in the gardens-for, on bright winter mornings, we have the servants bring it out into the flower beds-becomes a party, as good as the revel of elves and fairies who feast on melons and syrups by moonlight.” Similarly, in *Clear Light of Day* Tara, the mother of two daughters has paid a visit to their old house in Delhi to sojourn with Bim and Baba before attending the wedding ceremony of Raja's eldest daughter Moyna in Hyderabad. During her stay with Bim and Baba, Bim and Tara have recollected their sweet painful childhood memories: "can you remember playing on the sand late in the evening and the white horse riding by, Hyder ali Sahib up on it, high above us, and his peon running in front of him, shouting, and his dog behind him, barking?" *(Clear Light of Day, page no. 38)*

Anita Desai has used the technique of symbolism in her novels. *Cry, the Peacock* is the literary double of *Voices in the City* in the use of symbols. In the former novel Toto’s death is a 'symbol of death as inevitable thing in human life' and in the latter the city Calcutta is a symbol of 'odorour of morality'. Again, *In Custody* is a literary double of *Journey to Ithaca* in the common use of third person omniscient narrator. On the other
hand, Clear Light of Day is another double of the novel In Custody in the use of poetry as narrative technique. In the novel In Custody Deven Sharma often remembers Nur Sahib’s verses. As for example, in Chapter IV when Deven meets a number of students who get shocked at the sight of Deven and stare at each other, a verse of Nur Sahib flashes in his mind: “Night ends, dawn breaks, and sorrow reappears, Addressing us in morning light with a cock’s shrill crow.” (In Custody, page no.66) In the beginning of Chapter VIII Deven has again recollected his first meeting with Nur Sahib and recitation of Nur’s poetry by him before Nur: “My body no more than a reed pen cut by the sword’s tip, Useless and dry till dipped in the ink of life’s blood.” (In Custody, page no.42) Similarly, in the novel Clear Light of Day Anita Desai has given poetry in the lips of Bim and she reads Lawrence’s Ship of Death silently in Chapter II during the deterioration of aunt’s health:

“Now launch the small ship, now as the body dies
And life departs, launch out, the fragile soul
In the fragile ship of courage, the ark of faith
With its store of food and little cooking pans
And change of clothes,
Upon the flood’s black waste
Upon the waters of the end
Upon the sea of death, where still
We sail darkly, for we cannot steer, and have no port.”

(Clear Light of Day, Chapter II)

And she also recalls the lines she read in The Waste Land lent by her elder brother Raja:

“Who is the third who walks always beside you?
When I count there are only you and I together
But when I look ahead up the white road
There is always another one walking beside you
Gliding wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded
I do not know whether a man or a woman
-But who is that on the other side of you?” (Clear Light of Day, Chapter II)

Conclusion:

In the fag end of discussion it is clear that most of the principal male characters like Gautama, Jiban, Prof. Kaul, Raman and Deven Sharma in the novels of Desai are carrying same blood in their veins. In other words, they are the fiancé of their own profession and passion. They can’t cope with the familial responsibilities. They have created their own domicile where the members of their family are considered as intruder. That is why, these characters are recorded as doubles. A close study and observation on the female characters of Anita Desai’s novels such as Monisha, Maya, Sarla, Sita indicates that they are all helpless and alone in the crowd of family. So, they are also counted as doubles. It can be said undoubtedly that to innovate doubling is Shakespearean and to execute and manage it with authority is Desaic. Shakespeare practised it in drama over characters’ appearance and action whereas Anita Desai has exercised it in novel over everything from character and their action to their life helm, choice, novel’s theme and technique or style. The application of doubling by Desai in her novels is so effective that doubles are vivid and vibrant.

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